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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Ms. Elysia Retzlaff et al.,

The intent of this letter is to voice my adamant support of withdrawing the proposed 20,574 acres from the Northwest and Northern environs of Pactola Lake/Reservoir. This is a crucial first step in the eventual process of protecting the entire watershed and primary source of fresh water for the regional communities, cultural sites, and economic activities of us downstream. Our livelihoods require this source of fresh water now and for decades to come. If any life is to be sustained in this arid climate amidst the mid-west fastest growing municipality, then we must continue to protect our water sources now.

I support the withdrawal because any threats to our community by industry or behavior must be addressed with steadfast opposition. Last April, I resigned after nearly 3.5 years as Chair from a local non-profit group whose sole stated purpose was to Congressionally influence regulations to protect the entire Rapid Creek watershed- all 220,000+ acres. What started off as one objective devolved into an unhealthy waste where members of this group acted in toxic manners, slandered members of our community, disrespected allies in public and private, and abruptly lost authenticity and integrity in my eyes. It was my right of protest to leave this group and maintain adherence to personal ethics to step away, and to see the forest from the trees. Bottom line: you cannot be toxic if you care about clean water. Love and respect are the only steps that move forward.

Similarly, an incursion into the Sacred Black Hills - the He Sapa - a settled land for some but the Native homeland and place of the Emergence Story by the Indigenous people of the Oceti Sakowin- also known as our family, friends, relatives, and vital pillars in our community, by an exploratory mineral extraction business entity licensed in Minnesota is an absolute reversal of justice, peace, and, ultimately, reconciliation for this region.

A finding of no significant impact was previously released by the USDA, which was then abruptly refuted due to the neglect for the process of Tribal Consultation (much less Consent) and departure from the respect of our own federal laws where Native water rights are also senior rights. What good is a country of laws w/o adherence? What good is a process w/o adherence?

But the ultimate question that no one on the mineral extraction side can answer is in regards to the exploratory drilling proposed and that is: "Who are you kidding?" There is no reason why any exploration would ever occur if there was not a possible pathway to capitalization and monetization? The exploits of this situation would not necessarily be of labor, as they boast time and again of the high wages for temporary mining positions (not a bonanza of jobs by any stretch), but of fundamental freedoms: rights. We have a right to clean water and clean air. As a society: our failure to govern ourselves to protect against high-risk exploration above the primary drinking source of western South Dakota's largest municipality, only level II trauma center, and largest Air Force base would be beyond the pale.

"But it's just exploration." No. It is not. As mentioned before, I have personally witnessed altruistic groups and dignified causes deteriorate by the weakness of human nature. If we truly care about the generation to come, we must recognize and acknowledge those weakness in all capacity from self-serving members or consultants of non-profits to mineral extracting cronies and robber barons, and work to protect what we can while we can.

Please interpret this letter as a democratic move to execute the mineral withdrawal of the proposed acreage around Pactola and continue to expand the mineral withdrawal area until every drop of drinking water that flows to our taps in Rapid (and beyond) is off the table from the mineral extraction industry.

Thank you,

James Preston